

Name: _____ Date: _____ Period: _____

Independent Reading Letter-Essays

Dear Students,

Letter-essays are a way for you, me, and your friends to consider books, authors, and writing. You'll think about books in informal essays directed to me and your classmates, and we'll write back to you about your ideas and observations. Your letter-essays and our responses will become a record of the reading, critiquing, learning, and teaching we accomplished together.

Each of your letter-essays should be at least three pages long and written in response to *one book*—in other words, not a series of paragraphs about a series of books, but a long look at one title that intrigued you. You should write a letter-essay to me or a friend every three weeks.

Before you write a letter-essay, look back over your reading record. Which title that you've finished would be enjoyable to revisit as a fan? What book that you remained hopeful about to the bitter end would be interesting to revisit in a slam? Once you've decided, return to the book, skim it to refresh your memory, write off-the-page about it, and select at least one passage that you think is significant, in terms of the theme, character development, or author's style: a chunk of text you think *shows something essential* about how the book is written. Hand copy or photocopy the passage you chose, include it in your letter-essay, and explain what it shows about the writing and your response to it.

What else might you do in a letter-essay? Describe what you noticed about how the author wrote. Tell about your experience as a reader of the book. Offer your opinions and pose your questions about the author, characters, plot structure, details, and voice. Definitely try the paragraph openers to fuel your thinking and writing. And *always* tell what you think the theme or *so what?* of a book is.

Once you've written your letter-essay, bring it to class on the due date and hand deliver it to your correspondent. If that's me, put it in my hands or in the wire basket. When a friend gives you his or her letter-essay, you should answer in at least paragraph length. After you've written back, hand deliver your response.

Date your letter-essays in the upper right-hand corner, and use a conventional greeting (*Dear _____*) and closing (*Love, Your friend, Sincerely*). Always cite the name of the author and the book title in the first paragraph. Indicate the title by capitalizing and underlining it, e.g., The Outsiders by S.E. Hinton.

I'm already looking forward to reading and thinking about literature with you in this serious-but-friendly way. I can't wait for your first letter-essay and a year of chances to learn from you, learn with you, and help you learn more about the power and pleasures of books.

Sincerely,
Mr. Hultgren

Name: _____ Date: _____ Period: _____

WRITING ABOUT READING: Some Openers

I was surprised when / angry about / moved by / amused at / confused when

I liked/didn't like the way the author

I admired

I noticed how the author

I don't get why the author

I wondered why

If I were the author, I would have

Compared with this author's other books,

This author's writing reminded me of

I thought the title was

I thought the lead was

I thought the main character's problem

I thought the main character's thoughts and feelings

I thought the character development

I thought the author's choice of narrative voice

The visual details and other descriptions

The dialogue

I thought the setting

The structure of the plot

The climax of the plot

I thought the way the author resolved the main character's problem

I thought the ending was

The genre of this book is

I wish that the author

I agree with / didn't agree with how the author

I was satisfied/dissatisfied with how the author

This is how I read this book

Next time I read a book like this, I'll

I rated this one _____ because

AND ALWAYS: I was struck / impressed / convinced / intrigued by this passage. It shows ... about the writing: (INSERT A SIGNIFICANT EXCERPT FROM THE BOOK AND ITS PAGE NUMBER)